

JOHN MCCAIN  
ARIZONA

CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON  
ARMED SERVICES  
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS

## United States Senate

October 26, 2017

218 RUSSELL SENATE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0303  
(202) 224-2235

2201 EAST CAMELBACK ROAD  
SUITE 115  
PHOENIX, AZ 85016  
(602) 952-2410

407 WEST CONGRESS STREET  
SUITE 103  
TUCSON, AZ 85701  
(520) 670-6334

Mr. Greg Sheehan  
Acting Director  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
5275 Leesburg Pike, 2N035  
Falls Church, VA 22041

Dear Acting Director Sheehan:

I write to request the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) assess and expand its recovery and captive breeding program for the endangered Mount Graham red squirrel.

As you know, the Mt. Graham red squirrel is a subspecies found only in the forests of the Pinaleno Mountains in Graham County, Arizona. The red squirrel population is in a freefall following the 48,000-acre Frye Fire that occurred this summer. The number of squirrels on Mount Graham has dropped to just 35, down from 252 squirrels surveyed in 2016. Much of the existing habitat for the squirrels has been lost to fire and insect damage. Only an estimated 590 acres of suitable squirrel habitat remains. Squirrel experts believe it will take significant human intervention to help the Mt. Graham red squirrels survive this winter.

In 2013, the USFWS initiated a pilot captive breeding program in coordination with the Phoenix Zoo, the Arizona Game and Fish Department, and other members of the Mt. Graham Red Squirrel Recovery Team. Currently, only five squirrels are in captivity and wildlife biologists have not yet successfully reared offspring. I am concerned that current pace of the pilot program may not be sufficient to sustain or recover the population. We must expand options for augmentation through captive breeding and release.

To this end, I respectfully request your assessment of the pilot program in the wake of the Frye Fire. Please identify next steps and a timeline for expanding the program. Thank you for your attention to this request and I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



John McCain  
United States Senate